

**20 Anniversary CALRE Seminar**

**“A ROLE FOR THE REGIONS IN A EUROPE IN TRANSITION”**

**(Oviedo, Spain, 24-25 July 2017)**

***First Seminar Session: Ideas for Europe***

**Speech by President Gudrun Mosler-Törnström  
Congress of Local and Regional Authorities  
Council of Europe**

Mr President,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The theme of this conference captures all too well the essential point of the challenge we face: Europe in transition. The whole world is indeed in transition today, after being “frozen” for almost 50 years by the Cold War with its bipolar “clarity”.

The end of this bipolar world set in motion political, economic and social forces of transformation, posing new and daunting challenges, and inspiring new theories and visions of development. After his famous “The End of History” in the 1990s, American political scientist Francis Fukuyama was obliged to write a new piece, “The Future of History”. Already at the end of the last century, British political scientist Hedley Bull wrote about an “Anarchical Society” in which sub-State and non-State actors play an increasingly important role on a par with national governments. French historian Pierre Rosanvallon ponders on how to build a society of equals based on the principles of singularity, reciprocity and commonality. There is much discourse today about a post-Westphalian world where the nation-State, protected for almost four centuries since the Peace of Westphalia, is now disappearing.

Against this background, what would be the role of regions in the European transition – and in particular, self-governing regions such as those represented by CALRE? This year's White Paper of the European Commission offers five scenarios for the future of Europe – all of which dealing with relations between member States, and none specifying the role of regions and local communities. Yet the new, emerging world order is clearly evolving towards a system of multi-polar distribution of powers, a system that we in Europe have known for quite some time as “multi-level governance”. This aspect, however, is regrettably missing from the Commission's White Paper.

On balance, the Council of Europe's annual reports on “State of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law”, by its Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland, set forth a complementary vision of the future Europe – a vision based not on the economic integration of nation-States but on a broader notion of democratic integration and democratic security of our societies, a Europe inclusive not only for member countries but first and foremost for European citizens that are in the centre of public policies.

This vision stresses the importance of decentralisation and dialogue on regional devolution as an essential component of a balanced distribution of powers and therefore enhanced democratic security. It puts forward measures for strengthening human rights protection and supporting integration and inclusive society as an effective response to the current threats of populism, migrant crisis and terrorism. Finally, this vision identifies fair representation and participation of citizens as key to good democratic governance and a remedy against the feeling of alienation, which fuels the rise of populism.

The regions, as well as local authorities, have a crucial role to play in shaping and implementing these measures. Increasingly, they are taking on the responsibilities for competences that have been traditionally seen as the prerogative of national governments – in the areas of democratic governance, the rule of law and delivery of human rights. The regions with legislative powers are spearheading this process, not least because their legislative assemblies – you, dear participants – are capable of adopting regional measures even ahead of national authorities.

For decades, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has been the driving force for strengthening the principles and institutions of local and regional governance on our continent, developing the local and regional dimension of European conventions and implementing provisions of those treaties at the grassroots, as well as promoting greater responsibilities for human rights protection at the community level. The European Charter of Local Self-Government, now complemented by its Additional Protocol on citizen participation, remains the key international convention and reference text for the devolution of power. As part of our work on human rights over the past decade, we have recently adopted the Congress Human Rights Action Plan and launched the preparation of a Human Rights Manual for local and regional authorities – a practical tool for addressing human rights challenges in our communities.

In this work, we are driven by the conviction that today's challenges can only be successfully addressed in societies and communities that are inclusive and participatory, where human rights and the rule of law are strong and well anchored. Achieving this, however, involves not only clearly defined competences, resources and power-sharing between different levels of government, not only effective mechanisms of citizen participation, and not only inclusive policies and measures for advancing integration and combating prejudice and discrimination. These are crucial, but the success of such measures also entails, probably as a starting point, active citizenship on the part of community residents. A well-built house without tenants is empty; public action without engaged citizens is idle. Education for active democratic citizenship is therefore just as important. Regions and local communities are the level where citizens learn their first democratic experience, and where direct interaction between citizens and authorities is possible and brings tangible results – much as they represent platforms for innovative practices of citizen engagement. They are also the space where different community groups interact and dialogue with one another, and where fostering intercultural relations and improving understanding of diversity are the most relevant.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Even in its best-case scenario of “more Europe for all member States”, the Commission’s White Paper acknowledges the risk of alienating parts of society which feel that the EU lacks legitimacy. Building a bridge, through regional representation, with integrated and inclusive communities based on citizen participation and protection of citizens’ human rights will serve to address this risk. This means that regions, and especially regions with legislative assemblies – your regions – must be involved even more in policy making at European level, to provide the legitimacy that is currently lacking.

I would like to conclude by referring to the once-popular slogan, “The nation-State is dead – long-live the region!”. Well, the nation-State is not exactly dead, but it is evolving rapidly under the pressures of globalisation. There are forces pulling back towards isolationism and the pursuit of narrowly defined national interests within a traditional nation-State of the past. And there are forces that are propelling Europe forward, towards a transformed and different State of the future, where national interests are seen as best served through the integration of the entire continent, and where resources are pooled to meet the needs of citizens and their communities regardless of their location on the European map.

I know I will be probably preaching to the choir when I say that the second vision is much more inspiring. To us in the Congress, the future Europe must be as much a Europe of Regions, a Europe of Communities as a Europe of national statehoods. This is the vision we are defending, and I am confident that it is shared by all of us present here.

I thank you for your attention and very much look forward to our discussion.

